

## VIKTOR BELENKO'S VISIT TO THE SHOPPING CENTER

*(Excerpt from MIG PILOT by John Barron) [Revised and edited for use in the public school system.] This story illustrates that in many modern countries people have limited resource and only the very rich in many other nations can afford the things U.S. citizens often take for granted.*

*In countries known as third world countries, or developing countries, the food situation is much more severe. In countries such as India, areas of Africa, and parts of South America hundreds of people die of starvation every day because they do not have the food let alone a supermarket in which to shop.*

**NOTE:** Italics indicate the private thoughts of Belenko as he contemplates what he is seeing.

They stopped at a shopping center on the outskirts of a small Virginia town and headed toward a clothing store, but Belenko insisted on inspecting a supermarket on the way. He noticed first the smell, or rather, the absence of smell; then he explored and stared in ever-widening wonder. Mountains of fruit and fresh vegetables; a long bin of sausages, frankfurters, wursts, salami, bologna, cold cuts; an equally long shelf of cheeses, thirty or forty different varieties; milk, butter, eggs, more than he had ever seen in any one place; the meat counter, at least twenty meters long, with virtually every kind of meat in the world-wrapped so you could take it in your hand, examine, and choose or not; labeled and graded as to quality. A date stamped on the package to warn when it would begin to spoil! And hams and chickens and turkeys! Cans and packages of almost everything edible with pictures showing their contents and labels reciting their contents. Long aisles of frozen foods, again with pictures on the packages. And juices, every kind of juice. Soaps and paper products and toiletries and much else that he did not recognize. [Soft drinks such as Cola!] American, German, Dutch, Danish, Australian, Mexican, Canadian [foods all ready to be eaten.] Nobody doled any of this out. You picked it out for yourself and put it in fancy, clear little bags and then in a big, expensive cart. It was all just there for anybody to take [to the check-out stand, pay for and take home]...

Never had Belenko been in a closed market selling meat or produce that did not smell of spoilage, of unwashed bins and counters, of decaying, unswept remnants of food. Never had he been in a market offering anything desirable that was not crowded inside, with lines waiting outside. Always he had been told that the masses of exploited [U.S. Citizen] lived in the shadow of hunger and that pockets of near starvation were widespread, and he had seen photographs that seemed to demonstrate that.

*If this were a real store, a woman in less than an hour could buy enough food in just this one place to feed a whole family for two weeks. But where are the people, the crowds, the lines? Ah, that proves it. This is not a real store, The people can't afford it. If they could, everybody would be here. It's a showplace of the Dark Forces. But what do they do with all the meat, fruit and vegetables, milk, and everything else that they can't keep here all the time? They must take it away for themselves every few nights and replace it.*

As Peter and Nick steered him back toward the clothing store, Belenko bolted into a shop

offering televisions, stereos, radios, and calculators. Several color television sets were tuned to different channels, and the brilliance and clarity of the hues as well as the diversity of the programs amazed him. So did a hand-held calculator and the technology it implied. But he was not fooled. A color television set in the [his country] cost a worker approximately five months' wages, and because of difficulties with transistors and solid-state circuitry, the quality was poor. Obviously this was another showplace of the Dark Forces packed with merchandise affordable only by the exceedingly rich.

He had to appraise the clothing store only a minute or so to realize that it also was a fake. Here were perhaps 300 suits, along with sports jackets, overcoats, raincoats hanging openly on racks, piles of trousers and shirts lying openly on counters, ties within the reach of anybody passing; even the shoes were out in the open--and all this was guarded by only a few clerks. Peter found a section containing perhaps twenty-five suits Belenko's size and started taking them from the rack for him to examine. *They know him here, and that's why he can do that.*

A toothy, glad-handing salesman approached and among other banalities remarked, "It always makes me glad to see a father buying suits for his sons." Belenko thought that whether planned or spontaneous, the comment, which Nick translated in a whisper, was hilarious, and thereafter Peter was known as Father Peter.

The three-piece flannel suit he selected at the advice of Peter required slight alterations, and the salesman suggested they could be made within half an hour if they had other shopping. More evidence. Who else but the Dark Forces could command such service? The purchased shirts, ties, underwear, socks, a warm-up suit and tennis shoes for jogging, a blazer, a raincoat with zip-out lining, and the finest pair of shoes Belenko has ever seen.

All of Belenko's suspicions about the true nature of the shopping center were fully and finally validated when he saw a service station on the corner. Three cars, all, as it happened, driven by women, were being fueled at the same time, a boy was cleaning the windshield of one car, and there were no lines. In Belenko's past life, gasoline outlets were so scarce that a wait of four or five hours for fuel was ordinary.

"I congratulate you," Belenko said en route back to the mansion. "That was a spectacular show you put on for me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that place; it's like one of our show *kolkhozes* where [our government] takes foreigners."

Nick laughed, but not Peter. ["Belenko], I give you my word that what you've just seen is a common, typical shopping center. There are tens of thousands of them all over [the U.S.A.]. Anywhere you go in the United States, north, south, east, west, you will see pretty much the same. Many of the shopping centers in the suburbs of our cities are bigger and fancier and nicer."

"Can the average American worker buy what we saw there? Can he buy a color television set?"

"Yes; if he's willing to pay more than for a black-and-white set, he can...more families have color sets than not. It's nothing to own a color television. But look, don't take my word. Wait until you travel around and see for yourself."

*Why argue with him? That's his job.*

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*The Dark Forces, they are not stupid. They would not tell me I could see anywhere what I saw today unless that is true--or unless they intend to imprison me or kill me. But if they're going to kill me or imprison me, what do they care what I think? I don't know. It can't be true. But if it is true, if what I saw is everywhere, then something is very right here.*